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AUTHOR Flambert, Richard
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ABSTRACT

A food-systems consultant and designer advises school districts that want prosperous food service programs to adopt big-business methods. Successful commercial operations hire top food-service consultants and designers to get the most from their space, equipment, and labor. Commercial enterprises are concerned with efficient utilization of plant and labor and periodically conduct seminars where other professionals show slides, give lectures, and have demonstrations to keep employees up-to-date on what is happening in the industry. Some form of centralization is necessary if a school district wishes to provide a satisfactory food service program. Only in this way can there be uniformity of quality, control of merchandise, standardized recipes and formulas, and employee and customer satisfaction. (Author/MLF)

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Flambert and Flambert, Inc.

A talk given by

Richard Flambert
President
Flambert and Flambert, Inc., San Francisco
Flambert, Flambert and Cochran Ltd., Calgary
Consultants and Designers Food Service Systems

on the subject
of

"School Food Service - Three Points of View"

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Dallas, Texas
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at the
Annual meeting of the
American Association of School Administrator
in conjunction with

Messrs. Herbert Rorex
and
Harry Redoglia

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After having been in the hotel and restaurant and night club business for many years as cook, chef, accountant, manager, general manager, designer, and general superintendent, in conjunction and in partnership with a lady who is generally referred to as my 95%, we decided to retire and devote the rest of our lives to eating, drinking, resting and staying in one place, having traveled well over 13,000,000 miles.

This was in 1947. Two months after retirement we were so thoroughly bored with inactivity that we decided to get back into the arena, but this time as consultants and designers. We returned to our native city of San Francisco, sent out a few letters to various hotel chains, universities, school districts, hospitals, and waited for the world to beat a path to our doors. We waited. We waited. The world took the wrong road. One day I read that the Los Angeles cafeteria system was losing over one-half million dollars a year. I phoned the Superintendent and told him who I was and he invited me to Los Angeles to discuss the situation with him. I did. We were hired to make a study of their food system; and, thus, one of our first jobs as consultants was a big one. Mrs. Flambert and I spent over two years with the District and turned out 11 volumes of programming some of which was red. Needless to say, the school lunch program was lifted out of the red and has been in the black for over twenty years, and during the last few years, the most difficult ones, as a result of the indefatigable and dynamic Harry Redoglia. I hope this accolade will get me a gallon of his

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homemade wine-vinegar.

How was this done? And how is it that some school districts' food service programs seem to thrive and prosper and grow while others do not?

In a well-ordered commercial food facility, there are several areas which must be integrated and interfaced in order to be successful. There is an owner, an architect, a food service consultant and designer and interior decorater; there is a purchasing department, auditing department, personnel department; there is a manager and his assistants; there is a chef and his assistants; there is a housekeeper and a sanitation department; there are engineers and mechanics; and finally there is the most important one -- the customer. In a school district there is generally an indifferent superintendent, a bored business manager, an uninspired food service director, managers, cooks, and helpers and, frequently, an inefficient method of reporting, accounting and purchasing. There are also captive customers. The fact that paid meals throughout the nation average less than one-third the potential does not speak well for the services of most school districts. Only because free lunches are becoming more prevalent do we find that this percentage of participation increases, not because of the efficiency of the operations. Even though most of the workers in school cafeterias are dedicated people, they usually work with uninteresting menus and antiquated equipment.

In commercial enterprises, equipment is of the latest design and is geared to produce the greatest number of units per man-hour of

labor. There is some built-in obsolescence in equipment because knowledgeable operators amortize their investment within seven years and realize that practically all kinds of food service equipment change within seven years. But in most school districts, equipment that is originally installed is there, is there, is there, until it disintegrates. Successful commercial operations hire top food service consultants and designers to get the most from their space, equipment and labor. Most school systems and many school architects hire an equipment house to set up the facility, fatuously thinking that this is the cheaper method. Commercial enterprises are concerned with satisfying customers and set up dining areas with proper color, accessories and lighting. Most school districts' dining areas are drab, unappetizing and regimented. In order to make a profit, commercial enterprises set up accounting and purchasing systems so that at any given time sales, costs, profits and losses can be shown. This is not always true in school districts.

Commercial enterprises are concerned with efficient utilization of plant and labor and periodically conduct seminars where other professionals show slides, give lectures, have demonstrations, to keep employees up-to-date on what is happening in the Industry. This is frequently missing in school districts.

I can almost sense some of your reactions. I quote, "This is fine for large-scale operators, but where is the money going to come from for us to do this?" My answer -- if a district's labor force produces on an average of 10 meals per man-hour, then the hourly scale is $2.50, and it then costs 25¢ to produce a meal. If that

figure could be raised to 20 meals per man-hour, the cost would be 12½¢ per meal. If modern machinery can cut the time necessary to produce and serve more meals per man-hour, there is a further cut. If all meals for a district are produced in one kitchen, it is obvious that the cost of the food and payroll would be less. If the dining room is colorful, inviting and cheerful, participation increases. We know this. We've tried it. If directors, managers, cooks and helpers are given the tools, such as equipment, seminars, slides, reading material, a humanized environment, they'll do better and more profitable work.

It might interest you to know that many of the labor-saving devices and machinery in the industry were first conceived in the central kitchens of school districts. Among these innovations are the food pump, the mixer-kettle, the ~~scraped-surface~~ continuous cookers, the convection oven, the pass-through heaters and refrigerators, etc. The first large kitchen in the country to feature color in walls, ceilings, floors, etc., in order to increase production and lessen fatigue, was in a school central kitchen.

Our firm has been involved in the programming and design of ~~most~~ nearly of the school central kitchens in the country, the last one being the enormous Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, complex, producing and serving 50,000 meals per day to 110 schools. We have come to the conclusion that some form of centralization is necessary if a school district wishes to provide a satisfactory food service program. Only in this way can there be uniformity of quality, control of merchandise, standardized recipes and formulas, and employee and customer satisfaction. Frequently, we hear of some

cooks doing good jobs and some cooks doing bad jobs. This can only happen at a decentralized food service operation.

As programs became more prevalent and larger, big business began to become interested. In some cities professional caterers have been engaged to conduct the food service program. And in our studies, perhaps, the first question we are asked is whether we approve of contractors being hired by the district. The principal argument for such services is that food service is taken out of the hands of amateurs and turned over to professionals with the necessary experience and expertise. Some school superintendents feel that they are not in the restaurant business but in the educational business, and that the amount of time required to be in the food service business is time taken from the more important field of learning and training. Both of these arguments sound plausible; however, there is another side to this theory. The caterer is in business for profit. The caterer has large budgets for advertising, publicity, overhead, travel, etc. If he is engaged by a school district in a purely managerial capacity, there is no reason why a school district cannot hire an efficient manager themselves. If a caterer is bringing food from the outside, there is obviously a markup on such food. This does not mean that we object to caterers. In many cases we have recommended that they be hired, but in far more cases we felt that the school district would be better off on their own.
(*Pittsburgh experience)

We cannot agree with the statement that the school district is not in the food business but in the educational business, as I do not think we can divorce the two. Food is education; education

is food.

Following this line of thought, why not farm out mathematics to IBM, English to Funk and Wagnalls, history to McGraw-Hill, chemistry to duPont, languages to Berlitz? In this way all you would require is an office coordinator, secretary and some aspirin.

We are at present involved in several centralized kitchens, and in all cases caterers have stated that they could do a more efficient job in the district. In no cases have we found this to be the case. No caterer can supply all the components required in school feeding. No caterer can produce and transport food to many individual schools at a lesser cost than a well organized district program can produce.

The importance of the food service program has never been demonstrated as profoundly as in San Francisco. Because of budget limitations and financing problems, it was impossible for the Board of Education to finance a centralized kitchen out of available funds. Acting upon our recommendations and report, the matter was put on the ballot -- the first time this had ever been done. The people had the opportunity of voting on a $7,800,000.00 complex, principally a central kitchen, with a tax increase of 5¢. The proposition passed with over 60% voting yes. Here is a case of going to the people with the facts and asking their support.
(*British Columbia situation)

Breakfast programs and the feeding of elderly citizens are beginning to make headway in some school areas. In many cities most of the meals are subsidized.

Thought is also being given to having the school cafeterias open 12 months a year instead of 9½. Children get just as hungry during the summer vacation as during the regular school year. Meals other than those served to children can also be handled during those idle school months, and it would afford 12 months' employment for cafeteria workers.

There are two new concepts in school feeding. The first is a questioning of the advisability and acceptability of the so-called "A" lunch. Some of the proponents of the discontinuance of the "A" lunch net format oppose it on the grounds that milk is unacceptable to many children and there is too much protein and not enough roughage; that it doesn't take into account ethnic familiarity with certain foods; that it is unopoular with many children who prefer the hamburger, French fry, milkshake syndrome.

The second major change is the advent of convenience and frozen food. Frozen food has the advantage of greater possible variety, greater keeping qualities, and in the case of centralized food preparation, greater cost savings in food and payroll. This new development has changed the layout of kitchens with greater emphasis on refrigeration and less on production machinery.

The school lunch program, like Topsy, has just 'growed'. It is now big business and big business methods must be used. There should be feasibility studies, programming, equipment studies, color studies, noise studies, and financing studies before embarking on a food service program. Independent professional consultants

should be engaged to work with the district to determine what is best for that particular district, and not equipment dealers who may only be interested in selling equipment and, specifically, their franchised equipment; nor a caterer whose only object is to make a profit.

Have I taken all of the romance and tenderness out of school feeding and substituted the computer and slide rule? By no means. Good food prepared in pleasant surroundings and served with loving care is romance, and, even more important, it is health, education and welfare.

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